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Op Ed: Vote Of Confidence
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“If you want to make enemies, try to change something,” former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson once said. His remarks especially ring true in Connecticut, which has well earned its nickname, the *Land of Steady Habits*. Of course change is necessary, and this Tuesday Connecticut is poised for a big one. For the first time in generations, Connecticut’s towns and cities will hold a general election without the use of one single lever voting machine.

In the last year, in an effort to help educate people about the new method of voting, my office has conducted 200 public voting machine demonstrations. At every one someone asks the question: “Why do we have to stop using the old lever voting machines? I’ve been using them all my life and I’m comfortable with them, so why do we have to switch to optical scan technology?” The answer is pretty simple. The federal Help America Vote Act, passed by Congress in 2002 to prevent another electoral debacle like the 2000 Presidential contest, requires that all voting systems produce a permanent paper record with a manual audit capacity. Connecticut’s lever machines do not meet this requirement, and therefore, are no longer suitable for elections in this state.

While many of us have voted our entire lives using lever machines, I urge voters to embrace this change. This technology is safe, simple and secure. Voters check in at the polling place and receive a paper ballot. They make their selections by filling in the oval next to a candidate’s name and then put the ballot through a scanner where the votes are tabulated. The paper ballot then drops into a locked ballot box where it can be used to verify election results.

My office, in collaboration with Registrars of Voters and other election officials, has been preparing the state for this change for nearly two years. We have delivered voting equipment to every city and town and trained 3,000 election officials and poll workers in over 200 sessions held in more than 30 regional training centers across the state. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Registrars of Voters across who have come to these trainings with their staffs and workers. In addition to the public demonstrations we have conducted, local Registrars, the League of Women Voters, and various community groups also conducted voter outreach and education. As a result of these combined efforts, Connecticut residents are ready to vote in the 21st century.

While other states like California struggle with touch screen voting machines that lack verifiable paper trails, Connecticut has chosen a system with a proven track record. Optical scan voting is the most common form of voting technology in America today, with a majority of counties nationwide voting on optical scan machines. During the 2006 general election, optical scan technology was used in 1,752 counties nationwide and we

join our New England neighbors Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island in using this technology. In Connecticut, a number of towns already used optical scan technology, including all 23 municipalities which held primaries in September.

As Connecticut makes the transition to new optical scan voting machines, it is imperative that voters have confidence that their vote will be recorded securely and accurately. This past legislative session, my office pushed hard for and succeeded in the passage of Public Act 07-194, An Act Concerning the Integrity and Security of the Voting Process. This law requires Connecticut to conduct random audits of 10% of all polling districts. This means that ballots will be hand counted and compared with machine totals.

To ensure the security and integrity of our election, my office has forged a truly unique partnership with the University of Connecticut's computer science and engineering department. A team led by Dr. Alex Shvartsman was instrumental in the selection of optical scan technology and has been invaluable in assisting my office in the development of tight physical custody and other security measures. The result is that Connecticut is a national leader in ensuring that elections are secure and accurate.

It should be clear - the table is now set for an historic and successful general election. The only thing missing is you. Polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m on Tuesday.